



STATE OF IOWA

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Iowa Child Welfare System Improves, But Still Short of Federal Test

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa – Iowa's child welfare system has improved steadily in the last several years, especially in preventing child removals or finding relatives to help if removal is necessary, but like all other states evaluated so far, Iowa will not pass the latest federal review, officials said Tuesday.

As a result, the Iowa Department of Human Services will assemble an improvement plan, just as it did in the first round of reviews seven years ago.

"Iowa is far ahead of where we were in 2003 but the federal benchmarks are even more difficult to reach in this second review, meaning every state will once again be required to improve," said DHS Director Charles Krogmeier.

"Iowa met the test of improvement in our first plan and we'll do it again," he said.

The federal review challenges states to prevent unnecessary removals, to keep children safe whether they are removed or not, to prevent multiple placements, to prevent re-entry into the foster system, to quickly find an adoptive home if reunification is not possible, and many other measures.

No state "passed" the first review and all 32 states evaluated in the second round have also been informed that they will need to improve.

In the wake of the first review in 2003, Iowa redesigned its child welfare system under the direction of Wendy Rickman, who is now the administrator of a DHS division that includes child welfare.

Rickman said Tuesday that a thorough "self assessment" of Iowa's system shows continued improvement.

"We have made impressive strides since the first review," she said. "We've done a much better job of surrounding fragile families with services so that we can prevent removals, and when that's not possible, we do a far better job of finding appropriate relatives to help out."

Other areas of strengths include keeping sibling groups together, ensuring educational needs of kids in foster care, addressing mental health needs, and ensuring safety in foster homes – where the standard is near perfection.

Rickman also said the state has turned around its worst rating in the 2003 review. At that time, DHS case managers conducted monthly visits with children in the foster system only 10 percent of the time.

Children are regularly visited by contracted social service agencies, but the federal benchmark also requires monthly visits by state case managers at least 95 percent of the time.

"We're now at 91 percent, which won't reach the standard, but we want kids in the system to know who their social worker is, and we've met the test," she said.

(more)

The next step in the federal review is an intense on-site visit to discuss randomly selected cases in Linn, Polk, and Webster counties.

Federal reviewers will then evaluate and approve Iowa's improvement plan sometime next year.

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Editors:

Here is a link to a chart showing the latest child welfare performance in six major areas. The results are posted quarterly.

<https://dhssecure.dhs.state.ia.us/digitaldashboard/>

Here is a link to the actual self-assessment, which states are required to compile in reviewing the child welfare system. It is quite lengthy.

http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/docs/06.15.2010_Statewide_Assessment.pdf

Here is a link to the latest one-page "child welfare by the numbers" summary:

<http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/docs/childwelfarebynumbers2009.pdf>